

**PRESS RELEASE**

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For Immediate Release:

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**National Estuaries Day: A Time to Appreciate a Vital Seacoast Resource**

Saturday, September 25, 2004, is National Estuaries Day and the New Hampshire Estuaries Project (NHEP) is conducting several activities to help Seacoast residents understand the importance of their estuaries and learn what is being done to protect these valuable resources.

The NHEP is conducting a V.I.P. tour of the Great Bay Estuary on board the UNH research vessel "Gulf Challenger" for planning board members and conservation commissioners who serve towns that lie within the coastal watershed. "Planning board members and conservation commissioners play a crucial role in the protection of the state's estuaries" said NHEP Director Jennifer Hunter. "This V.I.P. tour is designed to highlight the threats to our estuaries, the efforts underway to protect these natural resources and the assistance available from the NHEP to help communities protect the estuarine system." In addition to these special tours, the NHEP is also participating in a national radio campaign to raise awareness about estuaries and implementing an estuary education campaign in the high schools that service the 42 coastal watershed communities.

Increasing awareness is an important first step to protecting these NH resources. A recent poll conducted by the University of New Hampshire's Survey Center revealed that only thirteen percent of Seacoast residents can correctly identify an estuary as a waterway where fresh and salt water mix. This is surprising, since the coast's two major estuaries, the Great Bay Estuary and the Hampton/Seabrook Estuary, are extremely important natural, recreational, economic and cultural resources. The importance of the estuaries is not just a Seacoast issue, but one for the entire coastal watershed - which stretches north to Wakefield, west to Candia and south to Seabrook. In addition to providing food, recreation and beautiful scenery, the state's estuaries are also the receivers of treated wastewater and stormwater runoff from many of the communities in the coastal watershed. To maintain environmentally healthy estuaries, strategic land planning must occur throughout the coastal watershed to limit pollution and protect forested upland and other open space from development.

The New Hampshire Estuaries Project is a collaborative program funded by the US Environmental Protection Agency that involves governmental agencies, universities, non-profit organizations, businesses, and the public to protect, enhance and monitor the environmental quality of the state's coastal bays and rivers. The NHEP Management Plan, project reports and other resources are available at [www.nh.gov/nhep](http://www.nh.gov/nhep).

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